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ABSTRACT

In February 1988, a survey was conducted to examine placement procedures and developmental reading programs at two- and four-year colleges in New York State. Surveys were mailed to 30 two-year colleges and 28 four-year colleges, requesting information on the placement tests and cut-off scores used; types of additional diagnostic testing; course design, content, and grading procedures; and policies regarding the granting of college credit for remedial courses. Study findings, based on a 78% response rate included the following: (1) the Nelson-Denny Reading Test was the most commonly used placement test by both two- and four-year colleges; (2) 67% of the four-year colleges did not use a reading test for student placement, though 36% of these institutions had special programs in reading and writing for disadvantaged students; (3) 69% of the two-year colleges and 11% of the four-year colleges had mandatory placement into remedial programs for students with skill deficiencies; (4) 66% of the two-year colleges, offered reading courses at more than one level, with 21% providing four levels of coursework; and (5) at 30% of the two-year colleges and 12% of the four-year colleges, remedial reading courses were paired with other courses. The survey instrument is included. (EJV)

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A SURVEY OF COLLEGE READING PROGRAMS IN NEW YORK STATE: DIAGNOSIS, PLACEMENT AND PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Patricia A. Malinowski
September, 1988

JC 880 415

Introduction

The question of literacy has taken on paramount importance over the past several years due in part to Federal and state government reports and nationwide surveys. Our secondary schools have been criticized for failing to prepare students for the work force and for graduating students who are ill-prepared to assume leadership, let alone, menial roles in society. Some of these people are turning to what we view as institutions of higher education, the two and four year colleges, in the hopes of remediating this deficit in the areas of reading, writing and basic computational skills. Others who have been in the work force have found that the only way for advancement is through education and upon entering college find that their skill levels are below what is required to operate on a college level.

As this population becomes more visible on the college campus, programs labeled as remedial or developmental have evolved either as independent units or as tied to an already existing academic department (Rouche and Comstock, 1981). As part of this growth, educators within these areas have sought to establish placement and assessment guidelines from two aspects: what types of measurement and assessment tools are presently available and what type of tool best fits the specific population of the college. From this investigation, various approaches for whole class and individual instruction have developed across the nation.

In the area of placement and diagnostic testing, the Nelson Denny Reading Test has been recognized in current literature as the method most often used for both initial and diagnostic testing at the college level (Irvin and Lynch-Brown, 1988; Hartman, 1981; Gudan, 1983). The literature also cites this particular tool as being used across the nation for assessment in a majority of community colleges (Abraham, 1986; Pearse, 1982; Rivera, 1984; Edmonds, 1982; Forstall, 1984) while little literature discusses testing for reading ability at the four year college level. Furthermore, the NDRT is seen as popular because immediate test results can be provided which assess students' reading and vocabulary skills as well as show a correlation of student scores to the national average (Loucks, 1985). Current literature also cites the NDRT as a means of correlating student grades and reading ability to success in college (Hartman, 1981; Rivera, 1984).

Purpose

This paper and survey have evolved from an interest in investigating the current state of reading in New York State at the two and four year college level. Major concerns included the following questions:

1. What tests were most often used? Is there a consistency in established cut-off scores for placement?

2. What type of additional diagnostic testing takes place?

3. Is there a pattern of course design, content and grading procedures?

4. Do remedial/developmental students receive college (degree credit) for these courses?

5. Is there a pattern of consistency of what is happening in reading in two and four year colleges across New York State?

Method

An open-ended survey was designed to investigate the above questions and was used in the belief that the open ended- questions would solicit for of a response from reading educators.

The survey was initially mailed to 58 two and four year public and private colleges in New York state in February, 1988. A follow-up letter was sent to those who did not respond in March and telephone contact was made with some of the remaining schools during in April.

Returns were as follows:

Two year colleges:	30 sent	27 returned (90%)
Four year colleges:	28 sent	18 returned (64%)
Total :	58 sent	45 returned (78%)

Name of institution: _____

_____ Two year _____ Four year _____ Technical

1. How are students placed in reading courses at your institution? (If placement is the result of testing, please list the name of the instrument and give any "cut-off" scores.)

2. If testing shows a student should be in a reading course, is placement mandatory?

3. What type of additional testing (beyond placement testing) occurs in reading courses?

4. Are there different levels of reading courses at your institution? If so, please explain the sequence of these courses.

5. Do student in reading courses at your institution take other developmental/remedial courses? If so, please list courses.

6. Is the reading course at your institution paired with another course? If so, please explain.

7. What type of "credit" do students who complete a reading course at your institution receive?

8. Are grades given for your reading courses and how are they determined?

9. Are there some features of your reading courses that you feel are unique or innovative (eg. paired courses)?

10. What are the most troublesome concerns of the reading instructors on your campus?

11. Please list the reading courses offered and course description. Also forward any available syllabi and lists of texts in use. A photo copy of your college catalogue would be appropriate.

If you wish to receive the results of this survey, please give your name and address:

Survey Results

1. How are students placed in reading courses at your institution? (If placement is the result of testing, please list the name of the instrument and give any "cut-off" scores.)

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
NDRT	40%	16%
MAPS	23%	---
DTLS	15%	11%
Stanford	11%	---
Assessment & Placement Service for Comm. Coll.	4%	---
ACT-ASSET	4%	---
In-House Test	---	5%
None	4%	67%

The above table represents the percentage of two and four year colleges as to the tests most frequently used for initial placement testing of entering students. For both, the NDRT is the test most often used when testing is done. It is worth noting that while the majority of two year colleges use a reading test as an initial placement test, 67% of the four year schools do not. Of this 67%, 36% of the four colleges, reported special programs in reading and writing for special population students such as HEOP/EOP and "disadvatanged" students as recognized through specific grants. The method of testing and course design for this special population of students was not specified.

Cut off scores:

NDRT Range: 27%ile - 54%ile
32%ile was most frequently listed for placing students in remedial courses
40%ile was most frequently listed for placing students in standard courses

MAPS Range: 14%ile - 35%ile
27%ile was most frequently listed for placing students in remedial/developmental courses

DTLS Range: 30%ile - 67%ile
11 - 26 raw score

Other tests are not listed due to the fact that the number of times they were listed would not provide a range nor frequency.

2. If testing shows a student should be in a reading course, is placement mandatory?

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
Yes	69%	11%
No	25%	11%
For some majors	3%	28%
N/A	3%	50%

A majority of two year colleges require mandatory placement for students deficient in the area of reading while only half of the four year schools reporting do so. The 28% mandatory placement for certain majors for the four year schools indicates a type of student evaluation be it from high school records, SAT scores or institutional experience within specific curriculums.

3. What type of additional testing (beyond placement testing) occurs in reading courses?

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
In house tests	33%	22%
Stanford	18%	---
NDRT	18%	6%
DRP	11%	6%
CAT/Gates MacGinitie	7%	---
DTLS	---	6%
ASSET	3%	---

IOWA	3%	---
N/A	7%	60%

The above table indicates that there is, at present, no specific test which is used with regularity for additional diagnostic testing for students on the two and four year level after these students have been placed in remedial/developmental courses. Both the two and four year institutions designated a reliance upon in house testing; however, there were no specific reports as to what reading teachers use or have designed for this further diagnosis.

4. Are there different levels of reading courses at your institution? If so, please explain the sequence of these courses.

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
Yes	66%	22%
No	22%	5%
Specialized Program	4%	11%
N/A	7%	61%

As reported above, two year colleges offer various levels of reading courses. Of the 66% offering various levels, 74% of the schools offer two levels (often specified as remedial and developmental or credit and non-credit), 5% reported three levels, and 21% offer four levels of courses. Of those offering four levels of reading courses, all specified the need to serve an English as a Second Language (ESL or L2) population. In the area of specialized programs, a Controlled Reading Program, paired reading/writing courses and a modular course (3 - 5 week reading/writing/study skills modules) were enumerated.

5. Do students in reading courses at your institution take other developmental/remedial courses? If so, please list the courses.

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
Yes - per testing	92%	28%
No	4%	---
Per major	---	6%
N/A	4%	66%

The above results indicate a heavy placement of students at the two year level in additional remedial/ developmental courses. The following placement occurs:

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
Writing	38%	20%
Math	38%	40%
Study Skills	12%	20%
Other*	12%	20%

*Several institutions indicated placement in specialized courses such as pre-science courses.

Survey responses indicate that writing and math become the two subject areas in which most students are placed for further remediation besides reading.

6. Is the reading course at your institution paired with another course? If so, please explain.

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
Yes	30%	12%
No	62%	27%
N/A	8%	61%

The results from the returns on the above question indicate that the reading courses for the most part are taught in isolation. For the institutions that did "pair"

courses, the following was indicated:

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
Reading/Writing	43%	50%
Reading/Social Science	28%	---
Reading/Study Skills	14%	---
Reading/Other*	14%	50%

*This category represented special needs such as prescience courses and, in one case, a film course.

7. What type of "credit" do students who complete a reading course at your institution receive?

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
Imputed*	67%	17%
Imputed/Degree**	22%	---
Degree	7%	22%***
N/A	3%	61%

*Imputed credit - Students receive what is designated as financial aid or institutional credit. This allows students to be recognized as full-time students and as such are eligible for financial aid such as STAP, TAP and PELL. However, these credit hours do not apply to degree requirements.

**Imputed/Degree - Several colleges indicated this designation for their courses. Students receive imputed credit for remedial courses which does not apply to degree requirements and college credit for developmental courses which do apply to degree requirements as electives.

***The four year colleges (22%) who reported degree credit for reading courses also stated that this was elective credit and would apply toward degree requirements.

8. Are grades given for your reading courses and how are they determined?

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
Yes	88%	33%
No	---	---
N/A	4%	61%
Not reported	8%	6%

The above results indicate that the reading courses are graded. The "types" of grades are:

	Two Year Colleges	Four Year Colleges
Letter grades	65%	83%
Pass/Fail or Satisfactory/ Unsatisfactory	35%	17%

The most common grading system in effect is letter grades. For a majority of two year colleges, the letter grade is not included in the GPA of the students. For a majority students at the four year college, this grade is included as an elective toward graduation requirements and be calculated in the GPA.

9. Are there some features of your reading courses that you feel are unique or innovative (eg. paired courses)?

The responses to the above question are listed in order of frequency of appearance:

Two Year Colleges:

Paired courses

Computer assisted instruction (CAI)

Lab courses/Specialized group activities

Special programs

Use of college texts in reading courses

Supplemental instruction

Developmental counselor

Four Year Colleges:

Paired courses

Levels of reading courses

10. What are the most troublesome concerns of the reading instructors on your campus?

The responses to the above question are listed in order of frequency of appearance:

Two Year Colleges:

Reading defiencies of entering students/lack of time to deal with reading problems

Transference of reading skills to other areas

Advisement/Placement

Class size

Student motivation

Exit requirements

Type of credit received for courses

Lack of administrative support and/or college-wide support

Poor tests

Lack of software

Grading standards

The issue of whether a college should offer extensive remediation

Four Year Colleges:

Reading defiencies of entering students/lack of time to deal with reading problems

Lack of administrative support and/or college-wide support

Student motivation

Transference of reading skills to other areas

More students need to take reading courses

Interpretation Of Survey Results

This survey which was conducted in the Spring of 1988 had as its initial motivation a concern and desire to investigate the state of reading in two and four year colleges in New York. Having had the opportunity to discuss various programs with colleagues from across the state, I could not help but feel that reading programs on the college level, as a whole, were not consistent from college to college, reflected the philosophy of individual instructors be it a skills or holistic approach and, at times, did not reflect current trends in research. The responses to the survey speak to the initial questions for investigation which were posed, offer leeway for general implications, show some developing trends in the area of college reading and suggest several areas for further research.

First of all, the lower rate of return (64%) from the four year colleges (90% for two year colleges) surveyed is due to the lack of reading courses at this level. Follow up telephone conversations revealed that some people who were contacted through the mail felt no interest in a survey of this type because it was not relevant to their particular campus, so they did not respond. It is interesting to note that several respondents offered the information that reading or "special" tutorial courses are available to specific "high-risk" groups, that is HEOP/EOP students and students labeled as "disadvantaged" for grant

purposes. However, there does seem to be a trend toward establishing reading courses on four year campuses for the general population as reflected in the responses from eight institutions, seven of which already have reading courses and one which will be initiating reading courses in Fall of 1988. This trend is also reflected in the concerns voiced by educators at the four year institutions who felt that to insure success on the college level more students were in need of reading courses than were currently enrolled.

The first question of the survey had several purposes. The first was to establish which reading test is most frequently used for initial placement testing, come to an understanding of why this instrument was selected and investigate the possibility of standard cut-off scores for placement across the state. Current research (as stated in the Introduction) shows that the Nelson Denny Reading Test is most frequently used across the United States. Some surveys have estimated that the majority of community or two year colleges across the nation use the NDRT. (Irwin and Lynch-Brown, 1988) This frequency of use is also reflected in the results of this survey with 40% of two year schools and 16% of four year schools using the NDRT.

This offers several areas for interpretation. First of all, the lack of a consistent pattern for placement and diagnostic testing (as also shown in the responses to question 3), throughout the state and within the respective institutions, could reflect a pattern of use which is tied to

available finances for the particular institutions. This is one of the contentions of a survey conducted by Rauche and Comstock (1981) of two year colleges in Texas. One of the contentions of the Rauche and Comstock survey was that the NDRT provides a relatively cheap method for placement and diagnosis for areas (remedial/developmental) which are often not high priority areas on many campuses. Secondly, the use of the NDRT could serve the purpose of attaining a gross indication of student ability and a quick and efficient placement tool. Thirdly, because the NDRT does serve as a gross measure of reading ability, large gains and improvement can be measured in Pre- and Post-Testing. These gains might serve as justification, both financial and philosophical, for reading programs on campuses while not truly or accurately measuring abilities attained by students. Generally, the findings suggest no clear indication as to <u>why</u> colleges had elected to use the NDRT and further investigation is needed to answer this question.

Cut-off scores reported by two and four year colleges in New York State which use the NDRT are not significantly lower than what a recent survey has shown to be the average cut-off score across the nation for two year colleges. A survey conducted by Hartman (1981) found that the score of 49%ile (an average) served as a good cut-off point for predicting student success in college, the need for remediation and a correlation with the GPA. New York colleges most frequently list the 40%ile as the point from which students are placed

in either remedial/developmental courses or "regular" college courses. While this reported mode is lower than the mean reported by Hartman, the actual difference is probably not significant because of the process used to obtain a mean or average.

It is worth noting in the results of the survey that there is a wide range for initial placement as used by various institutions (NDRT [27%ile to 54%ile], MAPS [14%ile to 35%ile] and the DTLS [30%ile to 67%ile]). This range should be seen as no lack of or lowering of standards among institutions, but does reflect the various student populations which are served and the individual institution's attempts to meet these needs. The institutions which reported scores in the lower end of the range were also the institutions which offered three or four levels of reading courses. Again, this is another area which would lend itself to further investigation. A profile of the types of student populations be it rural/urban, ESL, special programs, handicapped, disadvantaged and so on that delineate the specific cut-off scores adopted by each college needs further definition.

The topic of the second question, mandatory placement, is one way to address the issue of literacy. Students sometimes believe that they can "walk" onto a college campus and register for any classes they would like. This is particularly true in community colleges which, for the most part, have an "Open Admissions Policy." The idea of mandatory

placement addresses the fact that not all are sufficiently prepared academically to become successful students and some degree of remedial and/or developmental education would be the appropriate first step. 69% of the two year colleges do have mandatory placement in courses such as reading, writing and math. For the most part, students who are mandated to take these courses do not receive credit toward their desired degree (as found in the responses to question 7) and the required coursework, in effect, can add as much as an additional semester of college. This can be a difficult suggestion to make to students who are very often interested in obtaining a two year degree and an immediate job. Strong administrative and college-wide support is necessary to insure the appropriate placement and advisement of these students. It is worth noting that a trend is developing at the two year level to insure the literacy of entering students and graduates. Several institutions have started to "close the open door" by setting up admissions committees to review student records and refuse some admittance. One institution has set a 12th grade reading level as a requirement for graduation. Other institutions have initiated writing tests to insure some standard for writing competency. And still others have designed registration processes which do not allow students to move into "standard" college courses without satisfactorily completing any needed remediation in the areas of reading, writing and math.

The results of the survey found that only 11% of the four year institutions do deal with the issue of mandatory placement in remedial/developmental courses. The admission policy at these institutions could be described as "closed" with a higher reliance upon SAT scores for acceptance. At the same time, 28% of the four year schools do require mandatory placement in reading courses for some majors. This suggests that both reading and other faculty members have realized that some students in particular curriculums are often not academically prepared and these colleges have then actively sought to insure that these students can be successful through remediation intervention.

One of the interesting results of this survey was the wide range of tests used for additional testing or diagnosis after initial placement. Eight tests are listed which suggests that educators have not found tests which are effective for diagnosis on the college level. Again, this inconsistency may reflect the same issues (financial, philosophical, student population demographics) addressed in the selection of the NDRT for initial placement testing. Since a large percentage of both the two (33%) and the four (22%) year colleges use in-house designed tests, it would be worth investigating what types of measures are used (IRIs, CLOZE, MAZE) as well as what measures are used for exit requirements from the reading courses. This issue of exit standards is an area in need of further investigation.

The fourth question of the survey was designed to

investigate the type of reading program established on campuses. 66% of two year schools and 22% of the four year schools indicated that they do have several levels of reading courses and that students are placed according to initial testing. The presence of the levels mirrors concerns noted by reading educators. These concerns included the low level of reading ability of entering students and the lack of time within the traditional semester structure to do remediation. The low level of reading ability is synonymous with the literacy issue - students wish to enter college and are just not academically prepared to do so. The lack of adequate time for remediation reflects a philosophical issue that is commonly faced by reading educators and that is the question of "How can I accomplish in fifteen weeks what has not been accomplished in 12 years of education or in the student's lifetime?" These various levels of courses are a beginning for dealing with these two issues of literacy and time. It is also an idea which needs full institutional support to be effective. Again, this is another area which is in need of further investigation. Moreover, a close look should be taken at the design of these courses as well as an investigation of the distinct purpose of each level.

The next question of the survey was designed to investigate the idea of students needing remediation in more than one area. Survey results indicate that this is true. For the two year schools, 92% of students enrolled in reading courses are also enrolled in other remedial/developmental

courses the most common being writing (38%) and math (38%). For four year institutions, 28% of the students enrolled in reading courses are also enrolled in remedial/developmental courses with a higher percentage in math (40%) as compared to the other areas of writing (20%), study skills (20%) and other courses (20%). Current literature reinforces the idea that students in need of remediation in one area are also in need of remediation in additional areas (Berlinger and Rosenshine, 1977). These figures have some frightening implications. For the recent high school graduate, something went drastically wrong. For the older students, the issue of just being able to survive - to be functionally literate - arises. This returns to the question of: "Can we, in one or two semesters (or more), remediate enough to enable survival in today's world?"

Another concern investigated in this survey was the emergence or development of paired courses on college campuses. Only 30% of two year colleges and 12% of four year colleges pair courses. These figures delineate the approach which is used in reading courses. The question of the amount of transference of reading skills to other courses when reading courses are taught in isolation becomes an issue. This isolation of the reading course makes the student responsible for transfering the knowledge gained in the course to other college courses.

When courses are paired, however, the reading/writing connection is the most often recognized possibility - 43% of

two year colleges and 50% of four year colleges are using this type of pairing. The trend is confirmed in current literature regarding the philosophy, course design and positive outcome of the reading/writing connection. (Malinowski, 1987)

The idea of "type" of credit students receive for reading courses was one of the major concerns for investigation of reading programs across the state. This concern was also echoed by fellow reading educators who believed that the credit issue did reduce the number of students who enrolled in remedial/developmental courses.

The issue of credit for remedial/developmental courses is a controversial issue on the two year college campus. Presently, two year colleges offer imputed credit, imputed credit/college credit or college credit for remedial/ developmental courses. Depending upon the "type" of credit, a student will either receive credit toward graduation requirements or not. For the most part, all of the above terms allow students to receive financial aid and be recognized as full time students.

As already explained in the survey results section, 67% of the two year colleges offer imputed credit to students. This is an albatross for remedial/developmental educators who must spend a good amount of time "talking" students into these courses. Mandatory placement is one answer to this question while college-wide support of such courses as reading is another. However, there certainly are students

who will fall through the proverbial "cracks."

As indicated in the response to the question regarding course credit, a majority of students do not receive any college credit for reading courses at the two year college level; therefore, these grades are not calculated into the GPA at the two year college. Since some four year colleges grant college elective degree credit, it is included in the GPA at four year colleges. In both cases, students do receive letter grades. This would indicate that instructors believe that the letter grade serves as a reinforcement for students' self-esteem, motivation and continues to be viewed as a measure of excellence in course work.

The next survey question dealt with reading teachers' perceptions of what is good about their particular reading programs. Both the two and four colleges indicated that paired courses were a high priority. Hopefully, this reflects a growing trend to pair reading and writing which, as already mentioned, is well documented in current literature as a successful instructional strategy (Collins, 1985; Grobe and Grobe,1977; Petrosky, 1982; Salvatori,1983). Other favorable aspects of reading programs included Computer Assisted Instruction, special programs and course design. These all suggest the effort to bring reading practices up to date both in technology and in current research.

The final question dealt with concerns faced by reading teachers on the college campus. Overwhelmingly, both two and four year college instructors felt deficiencies in reading

were the most difficult problem along with the amount of time that is allotted to deal with this problem. The other concern which received a high priority is the idea of transference of reading skills to other courses. Another high priority concern of reading teachers was administrative support. As is evident, the responses to this question are much in line with the initial concerns which initiated this survey.

Conclusions

This survey lends itself to several conclusions regarding the state of reading at the two and four year college level in New York State.

1. There tends to be little consistency across the state as to what instrument is used for initial placement testing. There is even less consistency regarding the instrument to be used for additional diagnostic testing. Further research is needed in order to assess why certain placement and diagnostic tools are in use and what specific purpose each serves.

2. Mandatory placement is in effect at a majority of the two year colleges. This policy enables students in need of remedial/developmental courses to be placed correctly which will, hopefully, in the long run enable them to complete college successfully.

3. Colleges recognize the fact that students need remediation in more than one area and students are very often placed in a reading, a writing and a basic math course. However, the trend to pair courses especially reading and writing is just beginning to take hold at the college level. Current research is in the initial stages of investigating the effects collaborative teaching and collaborative learning has upon students thus lending itself to another topic for further research.

4. College reading instructors are concerned with reading

being taught in isolation and the transference of attained reading skills to other college courses. Idealistically, students are expected to make this transfer. Little movement is being made to remedy this situation of the isolation of reading courses despite the fact that current literature supports the fact that a holistic approach is more effective.

5. The question of the "type" of credit students receive for reading courses do impact upon whether students take remedial/ developmental courses. In order to insure the success of more skill deficient students, every effort should be made to make enrollment in these courses a "worthwhile" venture. That is, students should receive credit that will apply to degree requirements.

6. This issue of credit also points out an inconsistency within the college system (Some colleges grant credit while others do not.) and the policy used by the New York State Education Department to designate which courses should be credit-bearing and which courses should not be. The idea of standards and just what characteristics earmark a college course are also issues relevant to the credit/non-credit controversy. Much discussion and clarification among all parties involved is needed on this issue. This is one case in which consistency among campuses should be established. Remedial/developmental courses should be recognized in all college across the state as credit bearing courses.

7. There is a need for a dialogue to take place among those teaching reading on the college level. This can occur

through professional organizations and should consist of a sharing of what is taking place on the college campus as well as a look at to future directions and sharing of concerns.

8. In order for any reading program to be successful on either the two or four year college campus, administrative and college-wide support is a key factor. This support adds an acceptability to courses which are often deemed as inappropriate for college students.

The teaching of reading on the college campus, whether it be a two or four year college, is certainly a service from which many students may benefit. It is important, however, that those involved in the subject periodically review methods, share what works, initiate and discuss what can be done for the students and become involved in researching the issues which face the college reading teacher.

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